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189

Reminiscences of Colored People of Princeton, N. J.

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There are so few histories of colored people, so few records of their brave and honorable deeds in history, that I feel constrained to record a few facts relative to these people. It is only a cursory glance I can give—I could easily enlarge the sketch to twice this size.

We are proud when we read in Nell's "Colored Patriots of the Revolution" that *Oliver Cromwell* enlisted in a company commanded by Capt. Lowrey, attached to the Second New Jersey Regiment, under command of Col. Israel Shreve. He was at the Battles of Trenton; *Princeton*, Brandywine, Monmouth and Yorktown. He was with the army at the retreat of the Delaware on the memorable crossing of December, 1776, and relates the story of the battles of the succeeding days with

enthusiasm. He gives the details of the march from Trenton to *Princeton*, and told with much humor "that they knocked the British about lively at *Princeton*." His discharge (says Dr. McCune Smith) at the end of the war, was in *Washington's own handwriting*. He was very proud of it and often spoke of it. He received an annual pension of \$96 until his death, January 24th, 1853, aged 100 years. Had he been white, every newspaper in the land would have been eloquent in his praise.

Henry Hill was also in the battle of *Princeton*. He was buried with the honors of war in 1833.

Caesar Trent was well known here in 1804. *Peter Polite*, as *Mr. Peter Scudder* was called, accumulated some property and owned and conducted a confectionery on Nassau street, says Hageman. He died in 1848.

Anthony Simmons was highly es-

teemed. He was the leading caterer and his place of business was next to Princeton Bank. His will disposed of half a dozen properties and devised to the Witherspoon Presbyterian Church all the property at the corner of Green and Witherspoon streets, worth now about \$7000, and gave a legacy of \$500 to Princeton University.

Joseph Ten Eyck, a Princetonian, was a celebrated caterer in New York city. He had a summer home at 256 Nassau street. He died about 15 years ago, leaving an estate of \$100,000. The largest legacy to Tuskegee Institute, from a colored person, was \$38,000, from Mrs. Mary Hood Shaw, his adopted daughter. Virtually his money.

Gilbert Scudder, Sr., operated a barber shop on Nassau street, and rated professors among his patrons.

Mrs. Catharine Scudder, his widow, is still an active, energetic woman, owning several properties. She is full

of happy reminiscences, and is one of the oldest members of the Presbyterian Church. She brought with her, when a bride, the first piano owned by a colored family in Princeton. Her daughter is a musician and elocutionist. Her sons are well-settled in business. Eugene conducts a second-hand clothing house on Baker street. Walter is a practicing physician in Philadelphia.

Elias Hart owned and conducted a restaurant on Witherspoon street. His widow still owns and occupies the property.

Samuel Onque and his brother owned a farm opposite.

Mr. Hoagland purchased a lot from it on which he built his home. His widow was a great worker in the Presbyterian Church.

Mr. John Voorhees was an elder in the Presbyterian Church. He and his wife, Amanda, owned a comfortable home, 23 Quarry street. He left his

estate in the hands of Mr. Joseph Bruere. After the death of Mr. Voorhees the church received \$400 from the estate.

Elias Conover was for twenty-five years in the Seminary. *Robert Hendrickson* and *Charles Whychoff* have followed him.

Philip Scudder was for many years sexton at Cemetery.

Isaac Stockton conducted a grocery store corner Green and Witherspoon streets. He was a shrewd and successful business man.

Mrs. Margaret Stockton was quite as well known as *Mrs. Craig*. She and *Mrs. Catharine Scudder* are about the last of Princeton's colored aristocracy. Her daughter, *Miss Martie Craig*, was an accomplished belle in her day. She was a great helper in the Presbyterian Church.

Charles Craig was the pioneer hackman, and his wife a famous cook. Their

son, *Prof. Walter Craig*, was New York's most famous colored violinist, and their daughter, *Jestina*, was school teacher and skilled pianist.

The *Gordons* were a large and influential family, like the *Simpsons*. *Mr. Simpson* was the pioneer second-hand clothes dealer.

Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Williams were the pioneer club-house keepers. Their numerous family still survive and reside in the homestead on Harrison street.

Mr. Thomas James was a familiar figure for some years. He was related to one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in Philadelphia. In his early life in Princeton he was thrifty and prosperous. His children buried him quite recently.

Mrs. Elon Berry is our "shut-in," but sends out sunshine.

"Some are and must be greater than the rest."

As early as 1816 a Mr. Boardman, a colored student, was here. Many have since graduated from the Seminary. Revs. L. Z. Johnson and G. S. Stark received the degree of A. B. on examination.

Betsey Stockton was one of the first members of the Presbyterian Church. Hageman tells us "she was a woman of sterling qualities and an excellent teacher." She was the first colored missionary to the Hawaiian Islands and, on her return, taught school. One of her pupils, *Mr. Thomas Schenck*, attended Lincoln University, graduating in 1869. A bronze tablet to her memory was recently unveiled in the Presbyterian Church by Mr. Weber, a former pupil, Gen. A. A. Woodhull making the address. A stained glass memorial window, the gift of her pupils, adorns the church and attests to her ability and their love.

Rev. Chas. W. Gardiner was pastor

of the First African Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia for 12 years, and an early record says "he was no mean expounder of the Word of God." He was a man of high mental attainments. His preaching was eloquent, impressive and effective. He was ever regarded as a profound thinker and leading ecclesiastical. In 1857 he was invited by my father, Joseph C. Bustill (then teaching there), to help form the First Colored Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg, Pa. He was pastor there several years. A fine portrait of him still hangs in the lecture room, evidencing their veneration for him. He spent the remaining years of his life at his home, corner Green and Wither-
spoon streets. Dr. Ashbel Green was always interested in him and remembered him in his will. His grandchildren, *Mrs. Till* and *Mrs. Boyer* are still among us.

Rev. Mahlon Van Horn was gradu-

ated from Lincoln University and, for twenty-five years, was pastor of a congregational church at Newport, R. I. He was appointed U. S. Consul at St. Thomas Island, and filled his position with honor to himself and with satisfaction to the Government. He died in office.

Who could write of Princeton colored people and omit "*Uncle Jimmy Johnson*? "He was at one time the oldest person connected with the university, because he had known Dr. Duffield s-s-since he was in kn-kn-knickerbockers." He came here a fugitive slave, was recognized by a student and soon was fleeing from the dreaded slave catcher. Mrs. Provost paid the \$1000 demanded and the students paid the cost of the sensational trial. Mr. Johnson often showed with justifiable pride his account of the *repayment of every cent*. He lived long to enjoy his freedom and was ever affectionately regarded by the

students. A granite stone "erected by graduates of Princeton University" marks his grave. His widow was a woman of fine presence, cultured and refined. She died less than a year ago.

James Titus, Sr., who owned his home on Green street, was for many years the trusted messenger of the university. His son, *James, Jr.*, was twenty-eight years gold melter and refiner for M. F. Cronin, Seventh and Sansom streets, Philadelphia. His son, *James, III*, owns several properties and resides in our town. His son, *George P. Titus*, was associated with his father till his death, when he succeeded him. He is now practical and consulting metalurgist for the Deuber Watchcase Manufacturing Co., Canton, O. His son, *James, IV*, graduated from the high school and business college of Canton, and is his father's assistant. A son of *James, III*, holds a position in the same company.

Rev. William D. Robeson was, for nearly twenty-five years, pastor of the Presbyterian Church. He was a graduate of Lincoln University and Seminary. His many superior qualities of mind and heart won for him many friends and kept his work pre-eminent. He gave to Princeton the best years of his life, made many improvements in the church methods and church property. He is ever the defender of justice—standing firmly for the rights of our race. He is a Christian gentleman. Two churches he has pastored since are gratified to have him help them so much—financially as well as spiritually. He is particularly successful in collecting funds. He has built one church and liquidated a large indebtedness on the other. He and his wife (M. Louisa Bustill (a Philadelphia school teacher), are of blessed memory to those who knew them. Their son, *William D., Jr.*, is the only colored Princeton graduate

of the Trenton High School. A graduate of Lincoln University, studied medicine at University of Pennsylvania. *Reeve* is doing well in Detroit. *Bennie* graduated from Biddle University and is now in the seminary. *Marion* graduated from Scotia and *Paul Bustill* is a member of the baseball, football and basketball teams and the Glee Club of Somerville High School.

"*Mom Stewart*" is a class by herself. Always jolly, sensible and persevering.

Mrs. Sarah Dillon is one of the oldest members of the Methodist Church. She has taught in the Presbyterian Sunday-school more than 50 years.

Her neighbor, *Miss Mary Chew*, owns several Lytle street properties.

Of our young people, *Mrs. Annie Vanzant Moore* and *Mrs. Lillian Scudder Proctor*, have taught in the public school. *Miss Eva Royster* is our only graduate from the Trenton Art School. *Leah Lake*, *Bertha Hall*, *Virginia*

Smith Rhetta, and *Ethel Vanzant* had partial courses in Trenton High School. *John Richmond*, *Bessie Moore*, *Marie French*, *Jenetta Watkins* and *Laura Garner* are the first colored pupils to enter Princeton High School. Several boys and girls are pursuing educational courses or following professions away from Princeton. *Dr. J. E. Proctor* is our only colored physician. *F. Louis Sperling* our only lawyer and Justice of the Peace.

The church music is of excellent character, being in such skillful hands as *Mrs. Blackwell*, *Mrs. Lambert* and *Mrs. Robinson*.

The Hoaglands, Sortors, Millers, Vanzants, Schencks, Lakes, Skillmans, Scudders, Roysters, Hagamans, Conovers, Van Horns, Eustices, Tituses, and many others were large and highly-respected families still represented.

The W i t h e r s p o o n Presbyterian Church is the most flourishing. It has

a large auditorium and parish house and several properties, all in good condition. They are valued at \$37,000. Rev. G. S. Stark is pastor.

Mt. Pisgah A. M. E. Church maintains its usual high standard. It was recently enlarged and remodeled. It is valued at \$15,000—Rev. Sturgis, pastor. The late Addison Gordon was a class leader and gave it a legacy from his \$80,000 estate.

The late Henry Shaw, Robert Hall, Mrs. Dowers, Mrs. Oakham and many more are its helpers. Mrs. Letitia Blackwell was the oldest member.

Bright Hope Baptist Church has a commodious building, with lecture room in basement—\$12,000; Rev. Jones is pastor. All three churches have their own parsonages, electric light and steam heat.

The Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Elks, Mo:ses and Good Samaritans are trustworthy beneficial Orders. The

Odd Fellows own their own hall. A company of colored men own and rent Douglass Hall.

A Young Men's Christian Association has been fitted up in a very spacious and comfortable building. Meetings, books, entertainment, etc., appeal to the men. Joseph W. Rhetta is secretary. The Women's Club is successfully teaching several branches of industry and furnishes entertainment for the women.

Our business men are William Moore, John Williams, George Mention, William Higgins, Theodore Williams, James Dickerson, Peter Brownley, William Green, Andrew Melchoir, Robert Braxton, John Coy, I. R. Farrier and Mr. Sheldon. Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Burrill are our business women.

Much I intended for this brief sketch is, of necessity, omitted, but I hope another may write more fully of the colored people of *Princeton*.

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139

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